



Traffic Safety News and Facts for Employers July 15, 2008

Latest Traffic Safety News

Driver Cell Phone Laws Vary Across U.S.

On July 1, California became the largest state to ban handheld cell phone use while driving, and a new Washington law went into effect the same day. Other states and cities have cell phone laws for drivers, but they vary widely. The risk of a crash with injuries involved rises four times when a driver is on the phone, according to the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety. Evidence shows that "cognitive distraction from the conversation" is what increases the crash risk and that hands-free sets aren't any safer. "Let's focus on the research and the data. We need a good highway (cellphone) safety law, and we don't have that yet," said a spokesman for the Governors Highway Safety Association. "We think it's best for states not to pass more legislation." But Hawaii and Massachusetts are considering doing just that. The cell phone industry has benefited from the laws, selling more head sets and hands-free systems after passage. For more information, go to http://www.usatoday.com/tech/wireless/phones/2008-06-24-cellphone-car-driving-headset_N.htm Source: USA Today, June 24, 2008

Insurance Company Uses Optional Black Box to Set Rates

Progressive Group of Insurance Companies developed MyRate, an optional car insurance program that uses a black box to record drivers' behavior and charge a customized rate based on the data. Participating drivers plug a small wireless device in their cars. The gadget records how, how much and when the car is driven, and people who drive carefully or during less-risky times can receive lower rates. The program will roll out across the country throughout this year and 2009. Source: Automotive Fleet, July 2, 2008

Small Cars Becoming More Popular, Safer

As gas prices rise, drivers are considering smaller, more fuel-efficient cars. Automakers have designed small cars to be safer than ever before by adding side air bags and using high-strength steel to reinforce the sides. The death rate for drivers of the smallest cars dropped in 2006, making small cars safer than small pickups. To further help small-car occupants, automakers are designing cars so their bumpers align when they crash and equipping them with collision-avoidance systems. Small-car sales are up 12 percent this year, while light-truck sales have fallen 16 percent. Now most small cars get good IIHS front crash ratings, whereas none did in 1997. For more information, go to <http://www.detnews.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20080625/AUTO01/806250374> Source: The Detroit News, June 25, 2008

IIHS Tests Show Bumper Rules Should Apply to Light Trucks

The Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS) thinks bumpers on light trucks should be at the same height as those on cars and petitioned the federal government for a bumper regulation. Car bumpers must be 16 to 20 inches off the ground, so when cars collide the bumpers engage and absorb most of the impact's energy. Similar regulations don't apply to SUVs, pickups and vans because regulators long thought bumpers could compromise the vehicles' utility. IIHS crash tests show that bumpers don't match up in SUV-to-car crashes, resulting in thousands of dollars of damage to both types of vehicles. The tests also show that bumpers don't affect SUVs' off-road performance or utility on loading ramps. Source: IIHS news release, July 1, 2008



Roadcheck Inspectors Find Fewer Out-of-Service Vehicles, More Seat Belt Violations

Investigators in CVSA's Roadcheck 2008 found the lowest rate of out-of-service vehicles in 21 years. The rate for Level 1 inspections was 23.9 percent, the lowest in Roadcheck's history. Investigators performed more than 67,000 inspections in early June. Drivers also experienced improvements in hours of service compliance rates. However, the number of seat belt violations rose significantly, and brakes continued to be the top out-of-service defect.

Source: CVSA News Release, June 26, 2008

California Drivers Face More Than A Fine if Cell Phone Violation Causes Death

Violators who ignore California's new ban on handheld cell phones for drivers could face major civil judgments or even jail if they cause a fatal crash. The fine itself is \$20, but a fatal crash might lead to a manslaughter charge with the possibility of a year of jail time for each death. A cell phone violation by itself probably would not justify a felony charge. Source: Automotive Fleet, June 26, 2008

In Tech Age, Two Hands on Wheel Still Best

Keeping both hands on the wheel gets harder and harder all the time, with gadgets like cell phones, iPhones and GPS units tempting drivers to multitask while driving. California's new handheld cell phone ban doesn't specifically prohibit texting, but proposed legislation would add it to the law. The state's Department of Motor Vehicles recommends drivers keep their hands at the 9 and 3 positions on the steering wheel for maximum control and safety in case the air bag deploys. Source: The Sacramento Bee, June 30, 2008

Motorcyclists Now Allowed to Go on Red in South Carolina

Bikers were at South Carolina Gov. Mark Sanford's side when he held a ceremonial signing of a new law that allows motorcyclists to run red lights after they stop at intersections. Motorcyclists, mo-peds and bicycles must stop for two minutes before entering an intersection if the light still has not turned green. The law was deemed necessary because automatic signal controls don't always detect the bikes. For more information, go to <http://www.greenvilleonline.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20080709/NEWS01/80709010>

Source: Greenvilleonline, July 9, 2008

Roads Could Be Safer Without Signs

Behavioral psychologist John Staddon contends that traffic signs condition drivers to be less observant, putting them at risk of "inattentional blindness." Great Britain has few mandatory stops, stop signs are just dashes in the road, and they really just mean yield. Roundabouts replace four-way stops, and road type determines speed limits. About 6,000 fewer Americans would die a year if the U.S. death rate were the same as the United Kingdom's. The available evidence suggests removing all road signs would be even safer. It's worked before, according to Staddon, in the Netherlands, Germany and even West Palm Beach. For more information, go to <http://features.csmonitor.com/environment/2008/06/25/do-traffic-laws-cause-accidents/>

Source: Christian Science Monitor, June 25, 2008

Commuters

Utah's Leaders Agree on Plan to Get Residents to Drive Less

Utah's governor and the mayors of Salt Lake City and Salt Lake County are banding together to encourage more drivers to carpool, ride a bike or use public transportation. They cite climate change, congestion, air pollution and rising energy costs as reasons for the campaign, which will start this fall. Salt Lake City Mayor Ralph Becker plans to emphasize bicycling, carpooling and involving employers. The city offers transit passes to public employees and instituted a no-idling policy for workers in city vehicles. Utah's upcoming four-day workweek for state employees also will help save energy costs. Becker suggested staggered workdays to relieve rush-hour commutes. For more information, go to http://www.sltrib.com/ci_9823844 Source: Salt Lake Tribune, July 9, 2008



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Advancing Technology

Chrysler Drivers Can Purchase Web Option in 2009

Chrysler has introduced UConnect Web, a wireless Internet option that will be available on all of its 2009 models. The automaker hopes the ability to connect to the Web will set it apart from competitors and help improve sales. Some safety advocates think the option will be yet another distraction for drivers. "Surfing the Web is something people really don't have any business doing while they drive," said a spokesman for the Governors Highway Safety Association. While the service is intended solely for passenger use, there's nothing to prevent surfing while driving. Current cell phone bans wouldn't apply to Internet use in the car. Pricing details aren't final but would probably consist of a base price and a monthly or annual fee. For more information, go to <http://www.latimes.com/business/la-fi-wifcar25-2008jun25,0,1676276.story> Source: Los Angeles Times, June 25, 2008

Survey: Voice Activation Helps Reduce Distractions

Speech recognition significantly reduces distractions while selecting music, making calls and using navigation devices in the car, according to the results of a study by Nuance Communications Inc, a speech and imaging solutions provider. The 2008 In-Car Distraction Study exposed 30 drivers to a range of driving skills tests while performing various tasks in a simulation. Researchers studied participants' ability to maintain a steady course and also measured their eye movements. Speech input helped drivers stay the course and make faster calls. Source: Fleet Safety and Accident Management Weekly, July 8, 2008

News from USDOT

Rule Strengthens Drug Testing Procedures for Transportation Workers

The Department of Transportation issued a final rule in the June 25 Federal Register that required labs to test all DOT specimens collected in drug tests for evidence of tampering. The rule would cover about 12.1 million transportation employers and would make it harder for workers to cheat on drug tests. Observation procedures include checking employees for items designed to cheat on the tests and would be required for all return-to-duty and follow-up testing. The rule goes into effect Aug. 25. Source: USDOT News Release, June 30, 2008

Clearinghouse Provides Information to Improve Safety of Rural Roads

A new national clearinghouse for information about rural road safety has a home at the University of Minnesota. The clearinghouse is part of a national strategy to reduce deaths on rural roads by focusing on resources and new technology. It will distribute researchers' lessons learned to transportation officials and best practices for combating rural road fatalities. The Rural Safety Initiative will help states and local communities eliminate the risks drivers face on rural roads. Five key goals are safer drivers, better roads, smarter roads, better trained emergency responders and improved outreach and partnerships. About \$287 million in funding is available for the project. For more information, go to www.dot.gov/affairs/ruralsafety/ Source: USDOT news release, June 30, 2008

Revamped Crash Tests Will Help Consumers Choose Cars in 2010

The federal government plans to improve automobile crash tests and strengthen the five-star vehicle rating system to give consumers better safety information when purchasing a new car. Beginning with model year 2010, vehicles will get an overall safety rating that combines results from frontal, side and rollover tests, along with new frontal and side pole crash tests. Female crash dummies will be used in tests, and new testing for leg injuries will be completed. A new rating on emerging advanced technologies will be added so consumers can tell whether they're optional or standard features. For more information, go to http://www.nhtsa.gov/staticfiles/DOT/NHTSA/Rulemaking/Rules/Associated%20Files/NCAP_Final_Notice_July_08.pdf Source: USDOT news release, July 8, 2008



International Traffic Safety News

Road Rage Affects Companies' Reputations

At-work drivers' aggressive driving is putting company reputations at risk. More than one in three business drivers responding to an RAC survey said they've been a victim of physically threatening driving behavior. More than half admitted to shouting, swearing and gesturing at other drivers. About a fifth of fleet drivers said driving is less pleasurable than it was in 1988. RAC recommends better training to make sure employees know how to drive responsibly and respectfully. In the 20th annual Report on Motoring, 94 percent of the respondents said Britain remains a car-dependent society. Source: FleetNews, July 10, 2008

Work-Home

Graying of America Prompts Researchers to Change Vehicles, Roads and Behavior

Researchers are finding ways to redesign vehicles, roads and change driver behavior in preparation of the doubling of the over-65 population expected from 2000 to 2030. MIT's AgeLab is working on at least 20 aging studies regarding driver fatigue, vehicle technology and the effect of emotions and medications on driving. Some potential technologies include computerized dashboard displays where drivers could select a font and type size and computers that could adjust how the car operates based on the driver's range of motion and physical weaknesses. States are redesigning intersections to make them less confusing for older drivers. AAA Michigan spearheaded a project to make Detroit intersections more senior-friendly, and the injury rate for older drivers was cut by more than half. AAA and AARP are helping older drivers assess their cars and ability to drive. The CarFit consultation helps drivers determine how well they fit into their cars and what adjustments they can make to be safer. For more information, go to

http://www.nytimes.com/2008/06/22/automobiles/22OLDER.html?_r=2&partner=rssuserland&emc=rss&pagewanted=all&oref=slogin&oref=slogin Source: The New York Times, June 22, 2008

Phone System Texts Parents When Teen Drivers Go Too Fast

Parents soon could know whether their teen drivers are speeding without being in the car and without installing a black box. Teen Driver Support System is an in-vehicle cell phone monitor that gives drivers a vocal warning about excessive speeds before sending a text message to mom or dad. The system uses GPS and a database of speed limits to tell when the car is going too fast. It also can impose a lower speed limit to account for weather conditions. The system should be widely available within the next few years. Some cars can detect where occupants are sitting, and that information might be relayed in the future to tell parents how many passengers are riding with their teen. Source: Tribune Business News, June 30, 2008

Report Suggests Ways to Prepare for Surge of Older Drivers

For the most part, state licensing systems and mobility alternatives for older drivers are inadequate and inconsistent, according to a AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety report. Seniors and their families face challenges in determining whether they can drive safely, how their skills could improve and how to stay mobile if they no longer can drive. The report lists recommendations to improve licensing systems, such as voluntary reporting of dangerous driving behaviors, expanding the use of medical advisory boards and enhancing training and education for everyone who identifies high-risk drivers. States should screen all drivers applying for or renewing licenses to make sure they medically and functionally fit to drive, but that doesn't always happen. For more information, go to

www.AAAFoundation.org Source: AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety Release via Business Wire, July 10, 2008

Minimum Drinking Age of 21 Helps Save Lives

Legislation that limits the minimum drinking age to 21 saves lives, according to findings from a new study. Researchers from the Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation reviewed data from the Fatality Analysis Reporting System between 1982 and 1990. Findings show an 11 percent drop in alcohol-related traffic deaths among youth. States with strict laws against fake IDs saw 7 percent fewer alcohol-related fatalities among drivers



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21 and younger. Safety features in cars, better roadways and tougher drunk-driving laws also contributed to a reduction in fatalities.